United Nations E/CN.5/2011/NGO/23

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
2 December 2010

Original: English

Commission for Social Development
Forty-ninth session
9-18 February 2011
Item 3 (a) of the provisional agenda*
Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly: priority theme: poverty eradication

Statement submitted by HelpAge International, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/CN.5/2011/1.

10-66514 (E) 060111

Please recycle

Statement*

1. HelpAge International is a global network of 80 affiliated organizations and over 200 partners. It shares a vision to influence better practice on global ageing, poverty eradication and inclusive development. It works with older people worldwide to help them claim their rights and convey their concerns to policymakers.

2. Eight years after the Second World Assembly on Ageing, held in Madrid in April 2002, older women and men are saying that global ageing deserves more robust action from policymakers and greater recognition as one of the key challenges of the twenty-first century.

3. In November 2010 older peoples leaders from Cambodia, China, India, Myanmar, the Philippines, the Republic of Korea, Thailand and Viet Nam gathered in Viet Nam to share experiences and agree on common issues to take to policymakers. They made a specific call to their Governments and to the G-20 to take action on ageing within the three priority directions of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, and thereby support them to contribute to their children, their grandchildren and to the common good of their countries. They said that ensuring income, credit facilities, health and employment opportunities and enabling legislation for older women and men would not only reduce inequalities but also deliver social cohesion, build institutions and provide economic opportunities for all. They asked for the extension of their right to social security at lower age levels, emphasizing their good stewardship of such regular income. They asked for secure access to health services and low interest credit. They explained how their existing commitment to contribute to family, community and national economies will be greatly enhanced by the extension and greater coverage of existing social security schemes with lower age thresholds, the lifting of health user fees, guaranteed access to low interest credit and recognition of their labour as farmers and carers. They called for legislation to secure their right to social security, health and freedom from discrimination.

Ageing and poverty eradication

4. By 2030, there will be more people over 55 years than children under 15. In most countries of the developing world the greatest level of poverty and inequalities are found in intergenerational households of young children and grandparents. Such households are increasing in number and getting poorer as parents migrate to seek work or are not able to bring up their children because of HIV/AIDS, humanitarian disaster and conflict. Even though older people work until very late in life the absence of social security and health access makes the already chronic poverty of these households more persistent.

5. Why does this matter?

6. Global ageing affects all aspects of economic, social, fiscal and cultural life. While the trend of global ageing is currently most obvious in the developed world, it is in low- and middle-income countries that the global pattern of falling birth rates and rising life expectancy is most rapid.

* Issued without formal editing.

10-66511

7. According to the 2010 global preparedness index worldwide life expectancy at birth has increased by 21 years since 1950, a bigger gain over the past 60 years than humanity has achieved over the previous 6,000. Emerging market countries such as China, Brazil, India, Mexico and the Republic of Korea, are already experiencing a very rapid transition from young to old. For example, according to the Stanford Center on Longevity, life expectancy in China is 73, with almost 28 per cent of its population predicted to be in the older age cohort in 2040. According to *World Population Prospects: the 2008 revision*, in Brazil and Mexico, the over-60 age group will be over 22 per cent of the population by the same date.

8. Member States are committed to reducing the proportion of persons living in extreme poverty by one half by 2015, a commitment which is reiterated in paragraph 48 (a), of the 2002 Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing. Paragraph 48 (b) commits Member States to include older persons and programmes to reach the poverty reduction target. Currently the Millennium Development Goals indicators do not include old age poverty. Poverty data is not generally disaggregated and analysed by age. Furthermore, Millennium Development Goals reports do not routinely report on progress to halve poverty in old age. Nevertheless, data from the poorest countries show that the most extreme poverty levels are concentrated in households with older people and dependent children, in middle-income as well as low-income countries. HelpAge International calculations are that there are approximately 185 million older people living in poverty, and that these numbers are set to rise in line with the demographic transition.

Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing

9. Older women and men with whom HelpAge International works in the global campaign "Age demands action" have consistently called for specific actions under the priority directions of the 2002 Madrid Plan of Action on Ageing. Under the priority direction "ageing and development", they have called for their inclusion in plans to reach the Millennium Development Goals poverty targets, for secure income and for support in humanitarian contexts. Under the priority direction "health and well-being", they have called for equitable and affordable access to health care and support for their caregiving roles; under the priority direction "the enabling environment", they have called for action on their rights, for freedom from discrimination, and for their recognition as contributors.

10. The global "Age demands action" campaign has enabled older people to call for specific changes. Some of the results include concrete commitments for pensions in Bangladesh, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Nepal, the Philippines and Sri Lanka. In 2010, the Philippines Senior Citizen's Act was passed, which commits a pension of $11 a month to the poorest older people; the network of older peoples organizations supported by the Coalition of Services to the Elderly, is maintaining momentum on this issue so the law becomes a reality. In Kenya, action on ageing was enshrined in the revised 2010 Constitution. Following a march to Parliament where older people met the Financial Secretary within the Ministry of Finance and the Director of Pensions, $2.6 million for a non-contributory pension fund for older people was pledged alongside a pension programme for over 30,000 older people.

11. "Age demands action" activities have also led to pledges around the world to implement national ageing policies, many of which are based on the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing. For example, in Fiji consultation meetings

held with older people have led to a manifesto for change, which was discussed at the ministerial level and has resulted in Fijian cabinet action to draft a national policy on ageing. Other results include a promise for better access to doctors in hospitals in Bangladesh, and mobile medical units in South Africa.

Still more to be done

12. Eight years after the Plan of Action there is progress. For example, precisely those countries which are becoming old before they grow rich have agreed to progressively implement the United Nations social protection floor. Implementing the floor through costed long-term programmes to secure basic income, access to health care and support in kind or in transfers in old age, times of disability, unemployment and childhood will be very important to millions of older-headed households across the world. It will be a significant step in alleviating poverty and narrowing the development gap, essential to achieving sustainable global growth.

13. Nevertheless, more must be done to connect action on rapid population ageing to the achievement of global goals on poverty eradication. Unless this happens, in 2015 it is likely that older people will find themselves in the wrong half of the global goal to reduce poverty by one half.

Making connections

14. Links between persistent poverty levels and failure to act on issues affecting older people and those that depend on them can and must be made. HelpAge International programmes and evidence demonstrate how connections between ageing and the range of issues central to the fight against poverty are critical.

15. Middle generation adults leave behind their ageing parents and younger children in "skipped generation" situations; and in chronically poor households that are dependent on infrequent remittances. More action is needed to include older people in programmes and data to secure better outcomes of HIV/AIDS programmes, given that older relatives are the main carers for orphaned children and also contract HIV/AIDS. There is also a need for action on food security and agriculture in terms of age awareness — it is the older farmer that stays on to work depleted lands without regular input and support while the children leave in search of work elsewhere.

16. Older people and dependent children are those that stay behind, struggling to survive in the most environmentally damaged areas most affected by climate change.

17. Recent research by HelpAge International on action on ageing in emergency situations has revealed the shocking statistic that only 0.2 per cent of emergency funding targets older people.[1]

18. Health policies are still slow to act on chronic, life-limiting health problems, often treatable at low cost, but which currently affect and impoverish with out-of-pocket health expenditure millions of older people also responsible for children.

19. The extent and nature of work in older age requires special attention since even if a minimum of social protection is provided in older age, work is liable to

[1] HelpAge International, "A study of humanitarian financing for older people" (London, 2010).

continue until very old age, often in environments where "decent work" is very elusive and which are insecure, poorly paid and inappropriate. For example, China's working age population will probably peak around 2015, at about 1 billion, with a total population projected to peak around 2030. China's workforce will rapidly age; the number of young workers is already declining.

Way ahead

20. Global and national action must be taken to include and reach chronically poor households with co-dependent children and older people. Failure to act challenges the potential achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and global health and HIV/AIDS goals. Some concrete actions are as follows:

- Develop global and national poverty and Millennium Development Goals programmes, use age-disaggregated poverty and human development data, and adapt indicators to show progress on reducing the extreme poverty of older people
- Promote national and global investments in building the "enabling environment for ageing", including in emergency situations, to support urban, rural, social, fiscal and environmental planning in the range of low- and middle-income countries that are dealing with the demographic transition
- Promote recognition of and support for older people as contributors to intergenerational poverty reduction and support their efforts to build their own and their dependants' resilience, including in areas affected by environmental hazard and climate change
- Put in place costed anti-poverty programmes to implement the social protection floor package agreed by United Nations agencies in 2009 and Member States at the Millennium Development Goals High-level Plenary Meeting held in 2010
- Ensure inclusion of the perspectives of ageing into development by listening to and acting on the voices and lived experiences of older people worldwide; an essential mechanism for policy adjustments necessary to rise to the challenge of the demographic transition

21. The bottom-up review and appraisal process of the Plan of Action, agreed to by Member States in 2005, offers a unique opportunity for the global community to demonstrate its compliance with its commitments, especially commitments on poverty reduction. Action on older peoples poverty, and thereby intergenerational poverty, will be a major step forward within a global recovery package centred on the fight against poverty.

22. The global community of older women and men are ready to work with their elected representatives and the international community to fulfil these common goals.